



# Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

a new KLM destination



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■ HO CHI MINH CITY



# Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

## A new KLM destination

From March 30, 1993, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines is adding Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam to its world-wide network! It will be served once a week on Tuesday with a Boeing 747 aircraft. The flight numbers are KL889/890.

### INTRODUCING...

Ho Chi Minh City, still commonly referred to by visitors and locals alike as Saigon, the largest city and river port of Vietnam with over 4.5 million inhabitants. Ho Chi Minh City is the Vietnamese centre of industry, tourism and international communication. The city sprawls across an area of 761 square miles along the Saigon River. It is divided into 12 urban and six rural districts. The changing tides of fortune which have swept over the country and its people have left their mark, greatly emphasizing the contrast between past and present.

### TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ho Chi Minh City is fast becoming the main business centre of Vietnam. Vietnam is traditionally an agricultural country but industry is beginning to develop at a moderate pace. In recent years, tourism has become an important industry.

### A BRIEF HISTORY

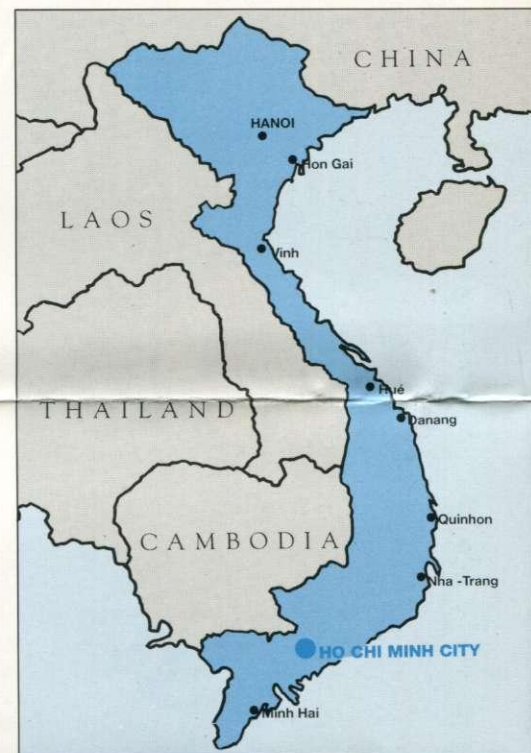
Vietnam is a country of great physical and rich cultural diversity whose history spans over 4,000 years. The land is marked by sites of ancient battles, ancient civilisations and kingdoms which flourished there long before the

French colonialists, Communism and the tragic war of the more recent past. Much of Vietnam's ancient past is shrouded in myths and legends of dragons and kings, heroes and heroines, gods and deities, brought to life in the present in the many time-honored traditional festivals and rituals commemorating revered ancestors, who are worshipped alongside Buddhist, Taoist and Hindu deities in the thousands of temples and pagodas throughout the country.

In 1859 French and Spanish ships landed at Vietnam. Saigon was captured later the same year and became the capital of the French colony of Cochinchina a few years later. Modernisation accompanied colonisation. The city developed rapidly, becoming somewhat of a French colonial establishment. After the division of the country in 1954, Saigon became the capital of the Republic of South Vietnam until it fell to the Communists in May 1975. The revolutionary authorities renamed it Ho Chi Minh City.

### AROUND TOWN

Ho Chi Minh is an intriguing mix of traditional, colonial and modern buildings. As fast as the French and later the Americans were establishing their Western culture and architecture in Saigon, the Vietnamese were retaliating with many pagodas, shrines and temples that sprung up all around the city. There are Buddhist temples, Indian temples and Muslim mosques.



Many of the Vietnamese and Chinese temples are not actually Buddhist, but are dedicated to the worship of certain legendary or historical heroes.

### Pagodas and temples

**Gia Lam Pagoda**, dates from the end of the 17th century, houses carved jack wooden statues. **Vinh Nghiem Pagoda**, the newest and largest pagoda in the city, Japanese style with many Buddha statues. **Ngoc Hoa Pagoda**, built by Cantonese Buddhists in 1892 features the Hall of Ten Hells. **Thien Hau Temple** (Heavenly Lady), Chinese, dedicated to the Goddess Protector of Sailors, frequented mainly by women. **Ha Chuong Pagoda**, includes a statue of the god happiness and an altar for sterile women. **Giac Vien Pagoda** contains 153 beautifully carved statues and statuettes. **Mariamman Hindu Temple**, caters to Saigon's 70-odd Hindu Tamils. **Den Hung**, a temple dedicated to ancestry of Hung Vuong, the founding king of Vietnam.

### Markets

**Ben Thanh Market**, covers over





11,000 square meters, offering an amazing array of produce, foodstuffs, and imported electronic goods as well as variety of local dishes.

**"Thieves Market"** offers mostly imported goods brought back by Vietnamese sailors or sent by overseas Vietnamese to their families back home. Cholon (Big Market), Saigon's Chinatown, colourful and noisy activity night and day, featuring richly decorated Chinese temples and pagodas. Cholon's main marketplace is **Binh Tay Market**.

### Museums

**National History Museum** (Vien Bao Tang Lich Su), documents the evolution of Vietnam's various cultures.

Exhibits include stone and bronze relics, stelae, bronze drums, Cham art, ceramics and traditional costumes.

**Reunification or Thong Nhat Conference Hall**, large modern edifice, symbol of the old regime, situated on the site of the former Norodom Palace.

Everything left intact as it was on April 30, 1975.

**War Museum**, occupies the former US Information Service Building, exhibits include American tanks, infantry weapons and photographs of the war atrocities committed by the Americans and Chinese.

**The Museum of the Revolution**, once known as Gia Long Palace, houses pictures of the anti-colonial executed.

**Nha Rong** (Dragon House), a memorial to Ho Chi Minh since 1979, has documents and pictures relating to Ho's life and revolutionary activities.

**City Hall:** ornate French-styled facade and interior, headquarters of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Council.

**Botanical and Zoological Gardens:** (Thao Cam Vien), a peaceful 82-acre garden housing, among others, birds, tigers, elephants and crocodiles.

### FESTIVITIES

**Tet:** Vietnam's most important and most cherished traditional festival is Tet. It is the occasion which unites the Vietnamese, who devote all their creative energy and resources to prepare for it, "eat" it and go all out to enjoy the fun, food and festivities associated with it. Tet is the sole time of the year when the usually discreet Vietnamese



society opens its heart, mind and cooking skills for all to see.

It is celebrated at the beginning of the lunar year, which falls between the Winter solstice and Spring equinox.

### BEYOND HO CHI MINH...

To see Saigon and its suburbs from a different perspective take a boat trip on the Saigon River. The picturesque village of **Thanh Da** is the countryside north of Saigon is a pleasant destination and an ideal picnic spot.

**Cu Chi** district played an important role in the wars against both the French and the Americans and is famous for its 200-km network of underground tunnels used by the communist guerillas. Guided tours are given.

**Tay Ninh** township, province, northwest of Saigon near the border of Cambodia, is home to the surreal temple of the **Holy See of the Cao Dai** religious sect stands. It is one of the most beautiful temples in the world.

Best time to arrive is before the daily ceremony at noon; special permission must be granted.

### ENTERTAINMENT TIPS

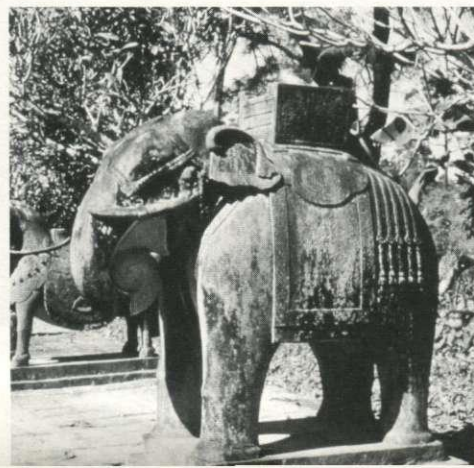
According to Confucius, "Personal cultivation begins with poetry, is made firm by the rule of decorum and is per-

fectured by music". Vietnam's artists use traditional art to communicate their ideas through the mediums of music, poetry, dance, theater, painting, sculpture and architecture. A blend of various theatrical forms including Court theatre, folk performances and assimilated foreign influences, today's Vietnamese theater presents three types of performances: the Cheo, the Tuong and the Cai Luong. Cheo, Vietnam's oldest form of theater, is as old as the nation itself. It is the most dramatic form of popular theatre.

Municipal Theatre (Nha Hat Thanh Pho) has a different show every week, anything from traditional Vietnamese theatre to acrobatics, gymnastics and disco music. The restaurant Maxims has a floor show and dancing.

### SHOPPING

Prices are in US dollars and subject to bargaining. The main commercial area is along the streets of Le Loi, Nguyen Hue, Le Thanh Ton and Dong Khoi. Traditional Vietnamese handicrafts offer a wide variety of wares to choose from. These include lacquerware, mother-of-pearl inlay, ceramics, pottery, precious wood, tortoise shell, embroidery, silk paintings, bamboo and wickerware, baskets, wool carpets, sculpture, wood, marble and bone carvings, jewelry, jade, engraving, silk and brocade. There is also the "non la", the famous Vietnamese conical hat and the "ao dai", the traditional costume worn by Vietnamese women. Russian vodka, caviar and even French champagne can be found at very reasonable prices. Clothing is comparatively cheap and local tailors can very quickly produce well made garments to the design of your choice.







## VIETNAMESE CUISINE

Visitors will discover a wide variety of fine dishes, delicately flavoured with fresh herbs, spices and "nuoc mam" (fish sauce) usually accompanied by "Nuoc cham" a condiment sauce of nuoc mam, lime juice, a little grated carrot, chili, garlic and sugar. Due to the highly inflated price of meat, seafood and river fish play an important part in the Vietnamese menu, particularly in the south. Pork, chicken, beef, duck and pigeon feature widely on the menu, plus a wide variety of vegetables and tropical fruit. A leftover from the colonial era, French bread is available throughout the country.

The famous national dish "cha gio" is made from crab and pork, mushrooms, prawns, rice vermicelli and beansprouts, rolled in a thin rice pancake then deep fried. These delicious crisp rolls are eaten wrapped in a lettuce leaf with fresh herbs and dipped in an accompanying sauce.

Ho Chi Minh's large hotel restaurants offer both Vietnamese specialties and Western dishes, particularly French, but be sure to check on the hours and book in advance if you're not a guest. The Ben Thanh Market food stalls offer an opportunity to try many of the local dishes. Cholon is the place to go for Chinese food.

## WHERE TO STAY

Some very good hotels have been built recently in Ho Chi Minh City.

The hotels built during the French and American eras have a certain faded charm and well worn comfort. Hotel staff are friendly and helpful and the food is good. Hotel rates are charged in US dollars. Some recommended hotels are Century Saigon, The Continental, Saigon Floating Hotel, Caravelle, International Hotel.

## GOING PLACES

### Public transportation

There is no public transportation available as yet within Ho Chi Minh City, except private cars with a driver and limited yellow cap type taxis, available from major hotels.

**Trishaw (cyclo).** Is for short distances probably the the easiest and cheapest form of transport. Besides walking, that is.

**Bicycles,** by far Vietnam's most common means of transport, can be hired but are not readily available.

**Driving.** If planning to travel outside the city, a comfortable (and expensive) option is to hire a car or minibus with a driver, either by the hour or for the day through the hotel or one of the tourist organisations. Private cars with an English speaking driver costs approximately US\$ 50 per day.

**Flying.** The most practical and rapid means of covering any great distance is by plane on the domestic routes served by the national airline, Hang Khong Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh's airport is Tan Son Nhat, 7 kms from the city.

## HELPFUL HINTS

### Climate

A dry season lasting from December to April and a rainy season from May to November. Light dress and a raincoat are recommended.

### Currency

Vietnam's unit of currency is the dong. VND 10450 = US\$ 1. The law and Vietnam's desire for US dollars require that visitors pay many of their expenses directly in US dollars. This applies for hotels, for national and international flights, purchases made in state-run tourist shops and hotel boutiques and for all Vietnam Tourism services.

### Drinking Water

Boiled or bottled water is recommended. Bottled as well as mineral water is available in most hotels.

### Electricity

110 and 220. 50 cycles.

### Languages

Vietnamese, the national language, is spoken by practically all the population. In business, also English and French are spoken.

### Passport and visas

All visitors to Vietnam, including overseas Vietnamese, must possess a valid passport and an entry visa. Visas can require some

time for processing and fall in to a number of categories, for example, tourist, business, journalist. All Visas must be issued by the nearest Vietnamese Consulate abroad.

### Tipping

A 10% service charge is added to the bill, but additional tips in US currency are appreciated.

## USEFUL ADDRESSES

### KLM Ho Chi Minh City

OSIC Building  
No. 8 Nguyen Hue Street  
District 1, Ho Chi Minh City

### Airport Office

Suite 10, The Representative House  
Tan Son Nhat Airport

### Saigon Tourist Travel Service

49 Le Thanh Ton  
Ho Chi Minh City  
Phone 295-000; 295-534; 225-885  
Fax 848/291-026

### Vietnam Chamber of Commerce

171 Vo Tai Sau Street  
District 3, Ho Chi Minh City  
Phone 230-301; 230-598